



April 2010

VISN 19 Network Director Update

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National News: (Click on titles to read full press release)

VA Marks 85 Years of "Discovery, Innovation and Advancement" - Eighty-five years of enriching the lives of Veterans and all Americans through top-notch medical research will be spotlighted April 26-30 when the Department of Veterans Affairs

celebrates National VA Research Week. (4/22/10)

VA Conducts Renewable Energy Studies - In support of ongoing renewable energy initiatives, the Department of Veterans Affairs has conducted studies evaluating the potential use of renewable fuels in energy plants supplying 38 VA medical centers around the country. (4/22/10)

Shinseki Awards Solar Energy Projects - The Department of Veterans Affairs has awarded \$20.2 million to install solar energy systems at 18 VA medical centers. (4/22/10)

Going "Green" -- VA Celebrates Earth Day - The 40th anniversary of Earth Day finds the Department of Veterans Affairs excelling year-round at "going green," with a variety of energy initiatives planned or begun. (4/22/10)

VA Uses Recovery Act Money to Repair Historic Monuments - The Department of Veterans Affairs will use up to \$4.4 million in funds from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act program to repair and preserve historic monuments and memorials at VA-operated national cemeteries, soldiers' lots and other facilities throughout the United States (4/16/10)

Secretary Shinseki Announces Staffing Boost with Recovery Act Funds - The Department of Veterans Affairs is putting Americans to work with funds from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, while bolstering staffing at VA benefits offices where Veterans' claims are processed. (4/14/10)

VA Health Information Technology Improves Quality of Health Care While Reducing Costs - The Department of Veterans Affairs has shown that health information technology provides improved quality of health care and substantial cost savings, according to a study in the public health journal "Health Affairs." The use of technology lowered costs while producing improvements in quality, safety and patient satisfaction. (4/7/10)

Secretary Shinseki Releases Draft Gulf War Task Force Report - Today, Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric K. Shinseki announced that the Department's Gulf War Veterans' Illnesses Task Force has completed the final draft of a comprehensive report that will redefine how the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) addresses the concerns of Veterans who deployed during the Gulf War in 1990 and 1991. (3/31/10)

"Women Veterans: An Education and Empowerment Forum" to Focus on Women Veterans - The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) will invite women Veterans and their advocates to a forum in July to discuss the quality of VA health care, the provision of benefits for women, and ways to improve access to the care and benefits for women Veterans. (3/29/10)

VISN 19: Updates on VISN 19's Four Rural Health Projects

1) Establishing Ten Primary Care Telehealth Outreach Clinics (PCTOCs) to serve an estimated 7,023 veterans in rural and highly rural counties in Colorado, Montana, Idaho, Utah, and Wyoming through the extensive use of telehealth modalities.



Primary Care Telehealth Outreach Clinics (PCTOCs)

- Montana
 - Plentywood – Medical Services Contract with Sheridan Memorial Hospital – Operational Target July 2010.

- Hamilton – Lease signed, minimal build out needed - Operational Target June 2010.
- Cheyenne
 - Rawlins, WY – Lease signed, minimal build out needed - Operational Target May/June 2010.
- ECHCS
 - Salida, CO – Operational.
- Grand Junction
 - Moab, UT- Lease Signed, build out underway - Operational Target May 2010.
 - Glenwood Springs, CO – Lease Signed, build being finalized - Operational Target June 2010.
- SLC
 - Idaho Falls, ID – Lease Signed, build out underway - Operational Target June/July 2010
 - Price, UT – Lease Signed, build out underway - Operational Target June/July 2010.
- Sheridan
 - Evanston – Lease Signed, build out plan finalized, Operational Target July 2010.
 - Worland – Lease signed, finalizing build out arrangements – Operational Target June 2010.

When PCTOCs are completed, 94% of the veteran patients will be within 60 minutes of Primary Care Services in VISN 19.

2) General Telehealth – Tele - Specialty Consultations:

General Telehealth (GT)-Tele-Specialty Service Clinical Champions are identified from ECHCS in Endocrinology, TeleTBI – Cognitive Impairment, TelePain, Tele-Dementia Services, Telemental Health – PTSD, Tele-Derm, Tele-Wound Care, Tele-Surgery, Tele-Cardiology, and Tele-Tumor Board. Service Agreements are also being developed for all activities at ECHCS.

An initial Tele-Endocrinology patient test for connectivity and telehealth video consult was successful and endorsed by clinical staff using a Sheridan/Denver consult.

The Specialty Scheduling System test was successful. This clinical pathway / consult management system focuses on ensuring both inter and intra facility consults and all the related activities for a telehealth visit: service agreements, clinic set-up/scheduling, consult templates, progress note templates, communication and follow-up are working as planned.

ECHCS specialty staffing was revised and staff recruitment is now underway in operations development for Endocrinology, Pain, and TeleDementia consultations.

The Operational Target for all Specialty Projects is July 2010.

3) Extended Education and Wellness – Using primarily telehealth modalities, this project will provide innovative education and wellness strategies to veterans in rural areas and will deliver intensive case management and education to veterans who have high-risk conditions.

A Tele-Patient Education Oversight Committee with representatives from each facility has been established and is functioning. They have established criteria for priority courses and targeted populations - starting with Diabetes Mellitus, Tobacco Cessation, Navigation with med management as curriculums have been established. Patient education staff has been hired and are on station at ECHCS.

A VISN-wide Evidence-Based & Web Based – Patient-Education system and materials are operational through CPRS access to materials for all providers for just in time patient education materials access in the exam rooms.

ECHCS has their consult system, class curriculums, and equipment in place to begin intra-facility pt education classes based on Krames modules which are online at <http://visn19.kramesonline.com>.

The inter-facility tele-consults process needed for inter-facility classes is being tested and refined. Outlook calendars for scheduling all Telehealth activity related to rooms and equipment are prepared for ECHCS and one is prepared for Sheridan for testing purposes.

4) vICU Project: Name changed to (Virtual)

The vICU is a “virtual ICU” that maintains access to critical care services in the four smaller facilities in VISN 19 (Fort Harrison, MT; Grand Junction, CO; Cheyenne, WY; and Sheridan, WY) by combining existing technology with expanded critical care nursing services and medical specialists located in Denver. Based on a tiered level implementation strategy, the vICU has been rolled out in a collaborative fashion across all five medical centers.

The vICU Project is now operational. Telehealth Equipment is on station at all facility sites. Additional equipment has been ordered and will be on site in 30 days. The Clinical Information System (CIS) has been contracted and installation and operations is expected by September, 2010.

Eastern Colorado Health Care System



Denver, CO – Replacement Medical Center Facility:

The Denver VAMC is providing monthly updates on the status of the Denver Replacement Hospital. Updates are distributed via e-mail monthly and can be found on <http://www.denver.va.gov/projecteagle/index.asp>.



Ms. Peggy Kearns, Associate Director, ECHCS actively participates as an injured patient in a mock medical evacuation in helicopter flight.

ECHCS participates in a disaster training exercise



The Eastern Colorado Health Care System participated in a training exercise conducted at DIA April 14, 2010 to test the readiness of the Federal Coordinating Center (FCC) at the Denver VA.

Pictured on the left are Ms. Peggy Kearns, Associate Director, ECHCS and Jordan Schupbach, Public Affairs Officer, ECHCS at DIA.



Photo Credit: Shawn Fury, ECHCS



Photo Credit: Shawn Fury, ECHCS

Photo credits: Shawn Fury, ECHCS

The exercise was a joint effort of the ESMHG Office, the Denver VA, Evans Army Hospital and multiple community agencies with support from the VISN Office. It was successful in training medical and administrative personnel how to work together to prepare for a disaster.

VA Montana Health Care System:



US Department of Veterans Affairs, Montana Chief of Staff, Faust Alvarez, MD, will retire after 25 years of service to veterans

After 25 great years, VA Montana Chief of Staff, Dr. Faust Alvarez is retiring. Dr. Alvarez started working for the VA Health Care System, January 1, 1969. He started his career as a resident at the Hines, IL VA. He then transferred to VA Montana June 10, 1984 and was appointed Chief of Staff on August 17th, 1986.

Prior to joining the VA system, he was in private practice in the city of Helena for 12 years from 1972 to 1984. During that time, he was founder and Director of the first Montana Chronic Hemodialysis Unit and Renal Program at St. Peter's Hospital.

Dr. Alvarez is a retired Colonel from the U.S. Army Reserve where he served as Regional Flight Surgeon and State Medical Commander for the Montana National Guard as well as flight surgeon to the 189th Aviation Battalion.



During his service he has received multiple decorations, including, five Commendation Medals and five Meritorious Service Medals by the U.S. Army Reserve for his distinguished service in the professional performance of all assigned duties. Upon his retirement he received the Legion of Merit. He is a member of various military professional societies, including, the Association of Military Surgeons of the United States and the Army Society of Flight Surgeons.

While with the VA Montana HCS, Dr. Alvarez was an instrumental driving force behind providing primary care access to Veterans in or near their home community. Today, the VA Montana HCS has 12 primary care sites and 2 more planned in Fiscal Year 2010. The first CBOC opened in 1992 and the twelfth opened in January 2009.

In addition, Dr. Alvarez introduced cardiac catheterization, polysomnography, EKG stress testing, pulmonary function testing, audiology, optometry, podiatry, chiropractic, and many other services too numerous to list to VAMTHCS. He was a strong supporter of Tele-Medicine in 1998.

Dr. Alvarez is a Fellow of the American College of Physicians (ACP), the professional organization of internists. Fellowship in ACP is an honorary designation recognizing scholarly and professional achievements in internal medicine. Dr. Alvarez is also a 1989 graduate of Leadership VA.

Dr. Alvarez was appointed by the Governor of the State of Montana to the State Board of Medical Examiners on which he served for a total of 18 years. He is actively involved in the community and has served as a member of the Regional Airport Board and other City of Helena boards. He is an active member of the Military Affairs Committee of the Helena Chamber of Commerce, and the Veterans of Foreign Wars Post #10010.

Dr. Alvarez was a member of the volunteer faculty of the University Of Utah School Of Medicine, Division of Family Practice. This appointment was received in 1990 and continued until the program was terminated in 2002.

He enjoys restoring classic automobiles and is both a fixed and rotary wing pilot and also holds a commercial instrument rating.

Dr. Alvarez has been a great asset to VA Montana, veterans and the community and he will truly be missed.

VAMTHCS Offers VA Adult Day Care Services

VA Montana Health Care System is pleased to announce that the **Rocky Mountain Care Center, Helena, MT**, was awarded a contract with the Veterans Center at Fort Harrison to provide **"VA Adult Day Care Services"**.

If veterans qualify, the VA may pay for your loved one to stay with the Care Center during the day so you may go uptown or out of town knowing they are being taken care of.

Some of the **"VA Adult Day Care Services"** include:

- Dedicated Day Care unit run separate from the Rocky Mountain Care Center nursing home.
- Breakfast, lunch, dinner with snacks between meals.
- On site nursing.
- Rooms for relaxing with beds, chairs, cable TV etc.
- Independent activities and group outings.

- Transportation to and from Rocky Mountain Care Center can be provided within 25 miles of the facility.

If this sounds like something that would fit your needs, please call Bill Powell at Rocky Mountain Care Center, (406)443-5880 or Ginney Gaschk at Fort Harrison VA Medical Center 406-447-7739

Sheridan VAMC:



With nearly three months of initial service, the Department of Veterans Affairs Star Valley Outpatient Clinic in Afton, Wyoming celebrated its grand opening celebration on April 22, 2010.

The clinic initially opened its doors on Feb 1 and has spent three months gearing up with a range of healthcare services including physicals, treatments for hypertension, diabetes, and services related to endocrinology, cardiology and dermatology. Services related to brain injury and speech therapy have also been included along with mental health services.

The Veterans Clinic is staffed by Sue Harrison, LPN, and Kate Resig, RN, and Gaye Bloxom, Physician's Assistant. Veterans from Star Valley, Jackson, Pinedale, Driggs and Victor have used the VA service in Afton.

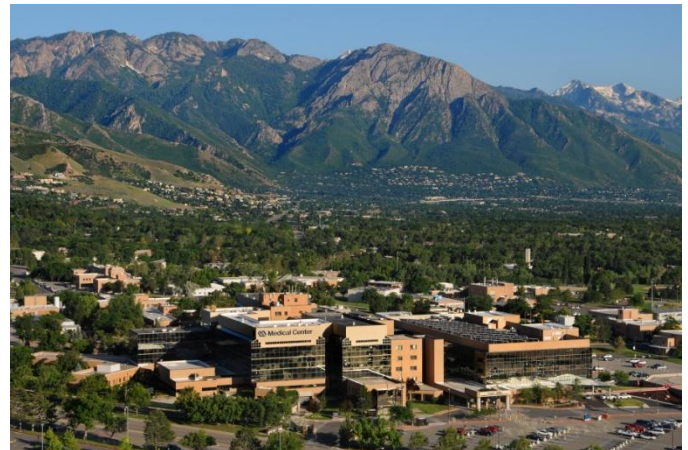


Pictured from left to right: Harri Browning, CBOC Director, Kate Resig, RN, Gayle Bloxom, PA, Sue Harrison, LPN, Debra L. Hirschman, Sheridan VAMC and CBOC Director



Afton Outreach Clinic ribbon cutting

VASLCHCS



VA Salt Lake City HCS Knows "It Takes a Community"

Looking around the room you see Muslim, Protestant, Catholic, Hindu, Latter Day Saint, Buddhist, and representatives from the Native American Culture. This gathering is not about a particular faith; however, it is about spirituality. Representatives from Salt Lake City's Interfaith Roundtable may someday find themselves on the frontlines as the eternal war rages on for many of our returning Veterans.

VA Salt Lake City Health Care System Suicide Prevention Coordinator Mike Koplin tells clergy members that "soldiers witness things that challenge their spiritual beliefs" and they simply are not the same when they return home. Repeated deployments make things even worse, that's why they must know what to look for, how to talk to them and who to refer them to for help. One in five suicides is committed by a Veteran.

VA Chaplain Supervisor Mark Allison has been a part of this roundtable since its inception in 2002. He's also taken the lead in the VA as a whole in reaching out to

Clergy in the community. Education is key to suicide prevention and some Veterans and their families may feel more comfortable going to their church for help. "Suicide is everyone's business. The ripple effect is far and wide and sooner or later we are all going to be up close and personal with someone or some family who has suffered through this tragedy. We have to be smart about this and as clergy be able to offer competent compassion. Allison is an LDS Chaplain and has also reached out to LDS authorities.

What started as just a local partnership has turned into a nationwide commitment by the LDS church to assist and provide VA resources and information to our returning Veterans. Today LDS clergy from coast to coast provide information on VA mental health services. "If we say the wrong thing at the wrong time to the wrong person we could really muck it up. We have to be able to recognize the veiled threats and the suicidal tendencies and address it, challenge it and confront it. We can do it together."



Religious Roundtable: Local religious leaders from different faiths gather to discuss Veterans mental health issues

VA Salt Lake City Honors Former Prisoners of War

They remember the exact measurements of their cell. They know exactly how many days they were held against their will and they know it was their will that kept them alive.

These extraordinary men and women endured captivity, suffered extreme deprivation, and sacrificed their own freedom to preserve the freedom of all Americans. They are the ultimate survivors when giving up or giving in was not an option.

The date is significant. Former POW Recognition Day is held each year on April 9, the day that a starving and exhausted U.S. military force at Bataan in the Philippines surrendered to the invading Japanese during World War II. Ten thousand American soldiers, along with thousands of Filipinos, were marched some 70 miles to a POW camp. An estimated 600 to 650 American soldiers died from maltreatment and murder

along the way. The rest faced years of brutal and deadly captivity in the Philippines and Japan.

An appreciation luncheon honored about 40 surviving POWs in Utah from World War Two to Vietnam. The event featured an invocation by Army Chaplain Perry Schmitt, who lauded the POWs for their bravery and also spoke of healing. "It is one thing to take a man out of prison, yet another thing to take the prison out of the man."

Eugene Neilsen was a young private first class in the 59th Coast Artillery in 1944 and among only 11 survivors of the massacre at Palawan in the Philippines. He recalls Japanese guards herding Allied war prisoners into trenches, soaking them with gasoline and lighting them on fire. Nielsen is 94 and remembers this as if it were yesterday. He ran for his life, dove off a cliff and hid in a pile of garbage and coconut husks. He was shot several times at sea trying to swim to safety. He swam through the night wounded and bleeding. Nearly nine hours later he was able to tell his story to an Army intelligence officer. His tale of torture is credited with prompting the rescue of hundreds of American and British soldiers held at the Cabanatuan POW camp.



POW Luncheon: Former Vietnam POW Lynn Beens speaks with local media after addressing Former POW Remembrance Luncheon attendees

The event highlight for sure was performances done by fifth graders from Meadowlark Elementary School in Salt Lake City. Led by their enthusiastic instructor Cindy Carleton, the group performed songs representing each branch of the service. Their spirit and sincerity brought some of the older Veterans to tears.

A Big Donation of "Bigger" Screen TVs! And who benefits...our patients of course!

The American Red Cross teamed up with Best Buy to purchase fifteen, 23 inch flat screen televisions for The George E. Wahlen VA Medical Center's patient rooms.

On April 14th the truck rolled up and the TVs rolled out...straight into the Salt Lake City VA! Voluntary

Service Manager Belinda Karabatsos said, "Patients have very small 9-inch televisions that were installed more than a dozen years ago. This has been on our wish list for years. These televisions will be so much nicer for our nation's Veterans who are ill and here for treatment. The larger screens will be much better for the visually impaired as well."

The Red Cross purchased approximately \$24,000 in supplies for the hospital thanks to a U.S. Department of Defense grant. Best Buy kicked in a generous discount that helped stretch every dollar. The purchase included TVs, mounts and one year of satellite service for patient rooms. Pass the remote!



TV Donation: Employees from the Salt Lake City VA Medical Center help unload fifteen 23" TV's donated by the Red Cross

Grand Junction VAMC:



The pace at the Grand Junction VA Medical Center has increased to the point that staff can almost hear Scotty's voice from Star Trek "She can't take any more Capt'in!" echoing in the hallways.

The month started on April 1 with the census and then quickly moved into several small outreach activities in local communities. Unlike earlier outreach efforts, most of the attendees were spouses of Veterans, rather than the Veterans. Most spouses had questions about health benefits, enrollment Eligibility and the C&P process.

The facility's engineering department also replaced an electric power main in April. The process took three and a half days, during the facility's backup generators where thoroughly tested. Leadership also used the event to exercise the medical center's emergency response plan.

Emergency prevention also played a major part in engineering's activities in April as work began on a seismic upgrade to the medical center's east and west wings. The upgrade involves installing pilings and large columns on each side of the wings, then drilling through the building to install reinforcing. The upgrade was required due to the discovery of fault lines which raised the earthquake threat level from low to medium.

Engineering also accepted the facility's newest building from the contractors. This building will add nearly 4,000 square feet and reduce some crowding, especially for Vocational Rehabilitation's Craft Therapy Program. Voc Rehab also expended its outdoor recreation program to include a class that takes Veterans from tying their first fly, to catching trout on the San Jan River. Other expansions include sports such as skiing, aquatic therapy. These expansions are highly dependent on volunteer support.

All the facility's volunteers were recognized at the Grand Junction VAMC's Annual Volunteer Ceremony April 19. The ceremony had a Hawaiian Luau theme and one of the highest attendance rates in the last several years.

One of the VISN's most active group of volunteers, The VFW's Kooties held their state convention in Grand Junction and took the time to stop by to tour the nation's smallest VA Medical Center, visit patients and be briefed on what the Medical Center's plans were for the next year. The group was especially interested in outreach and patient enrollment.

Cheyenne VAMC:



Numerous capital improvement projects are underway at the Cheyenne VAMC facility with several others beginning in the near future.

One of the projects visitors to the Cheyenne VAMC will likely see first is the construction of more designated parking areas. Signage is being developed and installed to help identify areas for temporary parking while the construction is taking place. As the parking lot projects wrap up, expect to see more signs that help to identify designated parking areas.

Also, the new Ambulatory Care Expansion project has reached a significant milestone. The 22, 000 square foot addition to the main campus will become the location where the majority of future primary care outpatients visits will take place. This design and engineering for this project is now complete and a ground breaking will be scheduled to take place in the later part of this fiscal year.

Another project that will also ramp up in the next few months stems from a \$20.2 million award to install solar energy systems at select VA medical centers. Of the 18 facilities slated for these renewable energy projects, Cheyenne will install one solar array on a roof and a second array over one of the parking lots.

Projects that are underway improving the condition and efficiency of the facility are not just limited to the main campus. Plans for the Rawlins VA Primary Care Telehealth Outreach Clinic (PCTOC) are also steadily moving forward. Currently, the location to provide VA Telehealth services has been contracted. The facility is undergoing minor build out and installation of the equipment used to furnish a tele-health exam room. The Rawlins RCTOC is anticipated to have a scheduled opening date in June 2010.